Traveller's Tales: ELT Teachers in a Globalising World

Introduction

> *The trouble with the English is that their history happened overseas, so they don't know what it means.* (Salman Rushdie 1989:343)

ELT is a specialised form of teaching, which differs from mainstream teaching in that it has aspects of both a profession and an industry. It is inherently a cross-cultural field, one that has expanded and developed significantly during the last thirty years, in parallel with historical, political, social and cultural developments that are continuing to shape the world. Most research into ELT has focused on its linguistic and methodological aspects, which are based on Western scientific traditions. The contributions and experiences of English language teachers themselves, especially their work in overseas contexts, have usually been overlooked. Native-speaking English teachers teach a world language which is contributing to the process of globalisation; therefore their work has important social and cultural ramifications. This chapter summarizes a quasi-ethnographic case study of the lives and work of nine native-speaking English language teachers who have lived and worked outside their countries of origin for extended periods. The study aimed to document the complexity of ELT as 'work' in new global economic and cultural conditions, and to explore how this complexity is realised in the everyday experiences of ELT teachers. The theoretical framework of Arjun Appadurai's (1990) *scapes*, or global flows of people, images, ideas, technology and money, was applied to the resulting narratives, and these provide rich information on issues of culture, globalisation, and the multi-positioned nature of ELT, a situation which can be understood in relation to three key characteristics of ELT teaching: its basis in powerful Eurocentric positions; its consequent engagement with issues of power; and how these are being reinvented in relation to forces of globalisation.

ELT and issues of power

ELT has long been connected to issues of power, politics and society. Much of the basis of modern ELT, its methodologies and views of the role the English language plays is rooted in the period of British empire-building. Phillipson (1992) notes that the methods for teaching spoken language originated in the colonial experience, during which a number of widely held tenets for ELT emerged, and were formulated by Gatenby (1965). These tenets include the notions that English is best taught in a monolingual (English-only) classroom, by a native speaker, and at an early stage. The monolingual tenet in particular reflects the common position in theoretical linguistics, inspired by Chomsky (1957), that in the study of second language acquisition, monolingual speakers are taken to be the norm (Braine, 1999).

The British Council, first established in 1934 as the British Committee for Relations with Other Countries, formalised the relationship between the teaching of English language and the dissemination of British cultural values. It provided a professional anchor and some kind of career structure for English language teachers, and also established the first academic journal, ELT, in 1946. Pennycook (1994) and Phillipson (1992) both analyse the Council's history, activities, and agendas, from pre World War 2 'cultural propaganda,' through post war 'development aid', to postmodern 'global commodity'. Phillipson (1992:51) suggests that the Council has a neo-colonial type of agenda, and that Centre-based ELT professionalism represents a form of 'linguistic imperialism', which contributes to global inequality. Alastair Pennycook (1994) also concludes that 'just teaching the language' is untenable. He believes that English language teaching can be connected to the construction of social difference and the struggle for voice, and advocates a new critical pedagogy, or education grounded in a desire for social change for ELT. Like Phillipson, he challenges the view that 'the spread and teaching of English are natural, neutral and beneficial,' drawing on an analysis of British colonial policy. Brutt-Griffler (2002) on the other hand points out that the majority of English speakers are multilingual, and claims that the relationship between language policy in colonial times and the spread of English is highly complex. She claims that English is a world language not solely because of colonial language policies, but also because of the struggle *against* imperialism. Her analysis of power and the English language reveals complexity and disjuncture, which is reflected in the experiences of the teachers in the study.

ELT and Globalisation

The indisputable emergence of English as a world language has led to a situation where former colonies and non-colonies are adopting the language for their own purposes. ELT has expanded in parallel with globalisation, but it is unclear whether there is a 'logic' or systematic plan in the way ELT is affiliated to globalising conditions; it may rather be a profession that is in a perpetually ad hoc and reactive state, as the status of what is termed 'world language English' ebbs and flows.

Appadurai (1990) sees globalisation as a disjunctive force. He proposes a model of global cultural flow in five dimensions, which he terms *scapes*. In the study the theoretical framework of these overlapping disjunctive flows was applied, as the scapes are an apt metaphor for the complexity of ELT and the positioning of teachers within it. A brief overview of Appadurai's framework follows.

Ethnoscapes are the landscape of persons who constitute the shifting world in which we live: tourists, immigrants, refugees, exiles, and guest workers. They affect the politics of and between nations. ELT teachers are part of this flow, part of a 'third culture', facilitating flows of educational and cultural information.

Technoscapes refer to how mass production is becoming globally integrated to supply mass consumption, on a global basis. Multinational enterprises are driven by increasingly complex relationships of money flows, political sensibilities and the availability of labour. Much of the communication between the disparate parts is in English, which drives the need for ELT.

Financescapes refer to economic flow, as in the 24- hour dealings of a global economy. It is related to the technoscapes, in that the flow of technology and people is driven by it. ELT teachers are affected by these financial flows in the same way as 'guest workers', travelling overseas for economic benefits. The large ELT private sector employs many administrators with business rather than academic backgrounds.

Mediascapes are the distribution of the electronic capabilities to produce and disseminate information, and the images of the world created by these media. This means that the reproduction of a range of social institutions, such as dress, architecture, and entertainment becomes more subject to global influences. It affects the materials of ELT, and also the 'raw material' of social data used in communication. Global media are increasingly accessible and influential, but the

information they disseminate may be interpreted differently according to specific cultural viewpoints.

Ideoscapes, related to Mediascapes, refers to images that are often directly political. English is a vehicle for traditions of thought, remade in new contexts. English for Special Purposes (ESP) and English for Academic Purposes (EAP) involve the use of English in ideological traditions of education and science. In the ELT classroom, contact between teachers and students may cause both to modify their respective positions on views of culture and learning.

Other ELT professionals are realising the importance of currents of globalisation for the future of ELT. Margaret Vai (2006) proclaims the need in the ELT field to understand crosscurrents of culture in addition to the cross-cultural awareness on which ELT has always focused. She suggests, as I do in the study discussed here, that this could be informed by Appadurai's (1990) concept of global flows and by Appiah's (2006) strong ethical stand on globalisation.

The Work of ELT

Mainstream teaching in the western world has in recent years been the focus of reorganisation by Western governments who wish to establish more control in the formation of socialising practices (Mahoney and Hextall 2000). It is becoming deskilled and at the same time more accountable and open to surveillance. ELT work in the private sector has always been subject to market law; the duality of public and private ELT has created misperceptions of the field from a mainstream perspective, even from modern language educators who might be expected to share the same applied linguistics foundation (Block 1998).

ELT shares with mainstream education a basis in euro-centric thought and traditions of education, and it is this area which may cause conflict with differing cultural traditions. The legitimisation of tenets of method at an early stage in the expansionist period of ELT has led to specialists being criticised for intolerance of other methods (see Wu 1983; Phillipson 1992; Canagarajah 1999). Kachru (1990:15) criticises the 'evangelical zeal with which pedagogical methods are propagated and presented to the developing third world, often with weak theoretical foundations, and with doubtful relevance to the sociological, educational and economic contexts of the

Outer Circle.' Educational goods are not necessarily 'value-free' and therefore appropriate for all contexts.

The Study

The inclusion of teachers and teacher identities within educational research is relatively new. Goodson (1992) argued such research was potentially empowering to teachers because it can generate teacher-centred, professional knowledge, as opposed to the knowledge that has been the preserve of the professional academic.

Johnston (1997) focused on ELT teachers, asking whether they can be said to have careers, and whether they regard themselves as professionals. His findings, based on a study of seventeen Polish ESL teachers, indicate that ELT is anything but a life-long career; many teachers leave the field long before middle age, unsustained by either an institutional career structure or personal career goals. He concludes that ELT can be an unstable, marginalised, impermanent occupation. Such findings were echoed by a Centre for British Teachers (CFBT) survey (1989), which revealed a heavy fall-out rate, (70% within five years of initial training), low initial commitment, very little in the way of decent pay, promotion prospects, responsibility posts or security of tenure to sustain long-term careers.

In the study described here, narratives were assembled and analysed from data collected at in-depth interviews with nine native-speaking ELT teachers with extensive experience in a range of non-English speaking countries. The analysis did not attempt to reach generalised statements or conclusions, but to provide 'thick descriptions' (Geertz, 1973) that may provide deeper understanding of the cultural semiology of ELT. It was hoped that this understanding may inform English language teachers, and also open or increase dialogue among different cultures of work and ethnicity.

The experience of the teachers reflected a wide variety of ELT contexts in the developed and developing worlds, which are difficult to reconcile in a generalisable form; one had worked with war-traumatised children in an African school with minimal resources beyond chalk and blackboards. Another had taught young adult middle-class females in a Japanese further education college, which had sophisticated technical resources such as photocopying facilities, audio-visual and computer equipment. The identities of the teachers themselves presented another set of

variables; these included aspects of personality, and stages along career trajectories. However, I will show that the experience of ELT work reveals patterns and issues for ELT teachers and students that relate to most expatriate contexts, and which will hopefully provide insights into the evolving nature of ELT.

Ethnoscapes: Othering and moments of disruption

The first area explored in interviews was how the experience of working in ELT as an expatriate led to feelings of being 'othered' and to perceived disruptions to previous patterns of culture-based thought and behaviour. Deryn, a teacher from Melbourne who had worked in the UK for three years, accepted work in Tenerife, Canary Islands to actively seek the experience of being othered, to 'explore the idea of foreign-ness', as she puts it. This 'othering' was primarily linguistic, and resulted in pedagogical implications for her; she betrays the fact that up to that point in her life she had taken at face value ELT tenets one and five (Phillipson, 1992: 185), that English is best taught monolingually and that if other languages are used much, English standards would drop. She remembers being shocked that students expected her to use Spanish in the classroom.

> *I suppose I felt resentful, because I considered that I was quite an experienced teacher, but I wasn't in fact, and I felt that they were wrong to expect me to speak Spanish, and that sense of not being able to speak Spanish and not…and of the sort of feeling that I was falling short somehow.*

Ian, a teacher from New Zealand who worked in South Korea for seventeen years, reports how the loss of cultural reference points affected his sense of identity in a profound manner when he first arrived there. He likened the experience to 'going back to being a baby again' when confronted with unfamiliar customs, and the lack of knowledge of spoken and written Korean made him initially mute and illiterate. The absence of familiar support structures such as family, friends, and especially language, are all factors which can create uncertainty and even emotional disturbance. They also create an environment where individual change occurs in various ways. Ian married into the culture and learned the Korean language, becoming immersed for such a time that when he eventually returned to live in Australia, he experienced 'reverse culture shock' during a particular moment, while waiting for a bus in Sydney

> *I saw a gentleman standing there, probably in his late 50s early 60s, and I went up to him and I suddenly realised, how do I address this guy? Suddenly here I was in my own culture saying 'what do I say?' hey, or excuse me, or g'day, I mean I thought this is crazy, this is my own culture, what am I doing?*

Another teacher, Ed from Liverpool, took his first overseas post in Italy, and remembers his initial 'disruption', becoming introspective and depressed during his first two months in Italy, a country with relatively less cultural distance to the UK. His anomie disappeared as his language skills in Italian improved. He later went on to Saudi Arabia, Brunei and Australia, and gradually developed a critical distance towards English society after long periods away from it.

> *I actually began to see for the first time the real cracks in English culture, in English society, we're not the biggest, the best, the greatest, certainly in the realms of education, I thought there's a lot of things which are awfully wrong with... the English education system, and that's why I've remained overseas for as long as I have.*

These kinds of multiple disruptions to an earlier sense of cultural identification were eventually seen by most teachers in the study as positive, if unsettling. They no longer belonged completely to their original culture or to a particular host culture. They had entered a third culture, which transcends geographical boundaries.

Mediascapes and ideoscapes: images of the 'West' and 'other cultures', and the roles of teachers

Through the media-based images that pervade modern civilisation, the worlds of commodities, news and politics are intertwined on a deep level. This kaleidoscopic agglomeration of images is therefore taken further in the ideoscapes, where they are endowed with political and ideological meanings. The English teachers in this study are involved, through the cultural practices of ELT, in the dissemination of an 'Enlightenment master-narrative' (Appadurai, 1990:300) associated with the western world to every variety of nation-state which may be politicised around other, different 'keywords' than western value-laden words such as 'democracy' or 'freedom' (Williams, 1976). Examples of teacher-location in these ideoscapes are frequent in this study as a representative sample of the global workforce of ELT teachers; it is

particularly salient where teachers have taken up work in cultures following different ideological narratives.

Today it can be argued that because of the operation of the mediascapes, the USA is the highest profile country when discussing what is good and bad about globalisation. If it is true that America is today not the only fount of globalisation, the fact that American imagery is so pervasive points to the power of communications media in general. Ian experienced the preference for an American model of English in South Korea. Alissa, a Canadian who switched from Psychology to ELT from a desire to travel, reported Japanese as 'looking up to Americans' at the same time as perceiving them as 'blonde devils' Deryn reported that in the Canary Islands attitudes towards English-speaking cultures are mixed.

> *I think people are enamoured of the US culture, all things American. Since the Olympic games a little bit with all things Australian, mixed attitudes, because there's the...very palpable downside of English culture that people see all the time here through British tourists in the south who come here on holiday.*

In the developing world disjunctures appear in the desire for English as a perceived global language in contexts where other local priorities may be more urgent. Two other British teachers in the study began their careers in developing Africa, Maria in Mozambique and Deborah in Cameroon. Maria questioned how empowering English is to children who have missed several years of education, and were not literate either in their first language or in the official national language, Portuguese. Deborah articulates similar sentiments from her experience in rural Cameroon. Her syllabus there echoes Phillipson's (1992:217) comment that 'the fact that most newly independent periphery-English countries were in a hurry to expand education, and accepted foreign support in doing so.' They therefore accepted Centre support, based on the belief that maintaining Centre standards of English was a priority. She had mixed feelings, feeling the International Volunteer Service (IVS) was giving students

> *the wrong sort of education.…training them for white-collar jobs when there weren't the jobs available, they were training them in 16th and 14th century English ...what's the purpose of learning that?*

Technoscapes and financescapes: dichotomies

The interview data showed that the work of ELT is especially characterised by a complexity of disjunctures in the technoscapes and financescapes. The teachers worked in a variety of contexts shaped by the needs and ideologies of nations, and by the varied needs of students themselves. They are part of a large and complex process of flows of money and technology, spanning state and private education, private sector business and the global tourist industry. They are lured to other countries by personal factors, but also transparently by economic ones, as classroom ELT in the major English-speaking countries is generally low paid and unstable in comparison to mainstream teaching, despite reported higher levels of satisfaction (Waites, 1999). The pedagogic and cultural information of teachers thus enters the technoscapes via the financescapes. The newer processes of capital flow and production are characterised by a sense of speed and unpredictability. ELT is situated in these flows in a variety of ways; it facilitates the use of capital in business and development around the world, and is in itself a large and complex global industry with two forms of product, mechanical and informational. An example of mechanical technology is the trade in printed and audio-visual material, and more recently computer software, emanating from ELT publishing houses. As informational technology it may be represented by teacher delivery in the classroom with supporting methodologies, and the flows of information that shape these, disseminated in ELT training, workshops and ELT conferences around the world.

The methodology of ELT is an important aspect of informational technology which has come under criticism from ELT professionals from both Centre and Periphery (Phillipson, 1992; Pennycook, 1994; Canagarajah, 1999; Holliday, 2006). ELT training inculcates to an extent the belief in method. A combination of the native speaker ideal and the PR that ELT consultants and agents spread outwards has instilled this idea among periphery teachers also. Canagarajah attributes this also to an aspect of the technoscapes, claiming that the applied linguistic circles of the Centre are dominant because of 'their ability to conduct sophisticated research using hi-tech facilities and then popularise the knowledge globally through their publishing networks and academic institutions' (Canagarajah, 2002:135).

The discrepancies between method as prescribed in training and actual experience has led to discussion of an emerging postmethod condition, in which teachers are exchanging the attempt to follow pre-defined methods for the creative formation of teaching strategies to suit specific teaching contexts (Kumaravadivelu, 1994). The experience of the teachers in this study testifies to the occurrence of this as a natural response to changes in teaching context and the experience of being 'othered'.

Such responses to change are again especially notable in the developing world, as Maria's experience in Mozambique showed. With the bare minimum of resources and learners who had missed out on several years of mainstream education because of civil war she had no choice but to develop new strategies of teaching. Deborah also reported an interesting disjuncture between ELT as aid and actual economic consequences. In Cameroon in the 1970s there was (and still is) a tendency for the educated young to move away from the areas of most need.

> *Their parents were spending quite a bit of money on giving them a privileged education which they knew - well they hoped would lead to a good job, but it would probably have meant that they would have to leave their local community and go to the city.*

This parallels the historical conditions of the Industrial Revolution in the West, but raises the question of whether the third world should develop in the same way. Thus 'education' as symbolised by competence in Standard English removes help from where it is most needed, yet Deborah reports students were still motivated by their parents' conditioned perceptions of what was best for them as individuals. In the context of developing countries, it appears that ELT facilitates flow in the ethnoscapes, but may put at a disadvantage the very communities that perceive ELT provision as positive, creating disjuncture within the financescapes and technoscapes.

Conclusion

Despite criticisms of Centre-based method-driven approaches as commodities with ideological content, the evidence from the data suggests that expatriate ELT creates situations where teachers are continually encouraged to adapt and reinvent their teaching identities. The teachers interviewed in this study have all spent most of their working lives during a period of ELT expansion and increasingly rapid globalisation. They have had to shift their position on an almost daily basis, as they negotiate the cultural, technical and economic flows of the scapes. They have entered Featherstone's (1990) 'third cultures' of new professionals, and may have gained inner strength in being forced, through the critical moments they reported, to develop their own philosophies and new methodologies of teaching in relative isolation. Graham, one of the teachers and now a Director of Studies in Australia, believes that because of this isolation and the wide variety of contexts, it would be difficult to build preparation for these difficulties into training, except in a very generic way.

However, I would claim that the narratives constructed from the data have described journeys with relevance to a wider field than simply language education. They are journeys of dislocation and renewal, which are geographical, cultural and personal.

I have sought through this study, as Phillipson (1992) has called for, to provide more links between method-driven ELT training and analysed experience, and also to suggest a number of recommendations that might enhance understanding of ELT in a changing world, where native-speaking teachers may not be the norm-bearers for much longer, as Deryn believes, referring to Graddol (1997). The recommendations from this study are therefore addressed to teachers, ELT professional organisations, and hiring organisations, especially large ELT providers. The study has shown that overseas ELT work involves a complexity of issues that should be addressed in training if ELT is to be fully regarded as a profession by other educational disciplines, and if it is to develop its effectiveness in the field. For teachers, I believe that training could address the many dichotomies in ELT. Dialogues could be opened between currently exclusive areas. In basic training, longer courses and intensive courses could be compared and mutually inform each other. Private sector intensive courses, which are typically the starting point for young teachers who seek work overseas, may not have the space for the kind of wider issues I am advocating, but as a trainer I support

their integrity in basic method training, and believe elements of them could inform longer postgraduate training courses.

For the professional organisations of ELT, I believe that the dichotomies of profession/industry, private/public, practical classroom teaching/academic research could be better integrated if the recommendations of this study were applied. It is in the interests of NS teachers and professional organisations that ELT should be based on a solid yet wide-ranging education in issues of language and society, not least to be able to claim equality with and respect from NNS teachers who are rightly questioning whether ELT is best applied through traditional Centre norms and beliefs.

For employers of NS teachers also, I believe such an enhanced professionalism would be beneficial. Naturally, it would be problematic to attempt to control hiring policies of small independent English language schools, but for large ELT providers, it would be in their interests to consider depth and breadth of training in the teachers they hire. If English really is a world language, then ELT is a field that should aspire to high educational, social and cultural standards.

I have also claimed that a study of this nature could inform not only workers in ELT but in related educational fields, which include nearer branches such as applied linguistics and modern languages, but also social and cultural studies. I have always observed the lack of formal contact with other disciplines while working in ELT, and I believe that dialogue should be opened with other branches of humanities, such as cultural studies, which would feed back into ELT training.

I asked these teachers through this study to share their knowledge and experience with others. Their stories described the multi-faceted work of ELT as a journey with relevance to many areas of individual, social and cultural life. They have seen diverse parts of the world and experienced disruption and disjuncture in their professional and personal lives. Their ‘accidental careers’ in other cultures have denied them access to power structures; nevertheless these teachers report that their experience has been a privilege.

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